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ADDRESS

OF THE

YEARLY MEETING OF FRIENDS

FOR NEW-ENGLAND,

HELD ON RHODE-ISLAND,

IN THE SIXTH MONTH, 1837.

TO ITS OWN MEMBERS, AND THOSE OF OTHER
CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES.

Published by direction of said Meeting.

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ADDRESS.

THE SUBJECT OF SLAVERY, as it now exists in some parts of our common country, having been brought impressively before us, at the present time, we have deemed it right to call the attention of our own, and of other Christian communities, to its serious consideration.

It is well known that the Society of Friends, as a religious body, have long maintained a decided testimony against holding their fellow men in bondage. A testimony which had its origin in a deep felt conviction that the practice could not be reconciled with the precepts and doctrines of the Christian religion. Yet in thus renewedly adverting to the subject, we feel no disposition to keep out of view, the fact, that in the earlier settlement of Friends in this country, many of them did, in common with other professors of the Christian name, participate in the practice; and we have thought that encouragement would be derived from a brief recurrence to the rise and progress of the concern for its removal, so far as relates to the Society of Friends.

Individuals of the Society, if not opposed to it from the commencement, very soon became uneasy with the system; they were drawn to a consideration of the subject on Christian principle, and becoming fully convinced that it was inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel of love and peace, they felt themselves called upon, not only to bear an individual testimony against it, but from a sense of religious duty, to labour, in love, with their brethren, for its removal. They saw, that the descendants of Africa were fellow beings, equally with ourselves the objects of Divine regard, and that the sacred injunction of doing unto others, in all things, as we would that they

should do unto us, was as applicable to them as to any other portion of the human family. The patient and persevering efforts of these, and of other pious men, who succeeded them, and in whom the love of God was largely accompanied with its never-failing attendant, the love of man, were eminently blessed;—the concern gradually extended, till neighborhoods and meetings were brought to see the inconsistency and injustice of claiming property in their fellow men;* and eventually the Society at large, having in their collective capacity, long been deeply exercised with a consideration of the subject, and having gradually advanced, step by step, towards so desirable a result, became united in restoring the enjoyment of the natural and inalienable rights of man, to all who had been held in a state of Slavery by members of the Society, throughout the several Yearly Meetings of Friends on this continent.—And for more than half a century, no person could hold his fellow being in bondage, and retain his connection with Friends.

Our predecessors in religious faith, having thus cleared themselves and the Society, from any participation in a practice which they believed to be inconsistent with the precepts and doctrines of our blessed Lord and his Apostles, the subject of Slavery has never ceased to occupy the feeling consideration of Friends, as a body of professing Christians, concerned for the promotion of truth and righteousness in the earth; and they have been led, from time to time, to cast whatever weight of influence they may have possessed, into the scale favorable to the cause of their enslaved fellow men, of African descent.

The testimony which was so dear to our worthy predecessors, and which they made many sacrifices to establish, (while Slavery was yet tolerated in *most*, if not *all* the States in which they resided,) is still cherished by us, and we have earnestly desired, may ever be inviolably maintained by all our members. We believe it to rest on the immutable basis of truth and justice, and of pure Christianity. We still continue deeply to sympathize with all who are under oppression. Yet we would remind all our dear Friends of every class and station in the Society, that as the concern had its origin in a faithful attention to the convictions of religious duty, so we believe that in all our efforts to advance *this* cause, as well as in

*See Note, at close.

every other *religious* concern, we should seek to Him, for the guidance of his Holy Spirit, who has declared, "Without me ye can do nothing." Thus should we become qualified, not only to see with clearness, what is called for at our hands, but the concern itself being preserved on its original ground, we should be enabled to labour for its advancement, under the influence of Gospel love, and with feelings of good will to every class of our fellow men. And we would, in tenderness of feeling add, that should any of our members be led, from whatever motive, to abandon *this* ground, we fear that not only an individual loss would be sustained, but that the cause itself would thereby suffer.

Let us then, dear Friends, continue to be united together, and act as one body, strengthening and encouraging one another, in our endeavors so to keep under the benign influence of the Spirit of the Gospel, in the discharge of this and every other Christian duty, that we may be enabled availingly to ask for right ability to perform every good work,—in humble reliance upon an over-ruling Providence,—remembering, that although Paul may plant, and Apollos water, it is God who giveth the increase.

And while thus engaged, renewedly to call the attention of our own members to this important Testimony, and to the principles on which we have ever considered it to rest,—we have believed,—that while Slavery continues to exist, to a fearful extent, in some portions of our beloved country, and while, in addition to its other enormous evils, the internal traffic in Slaves, continues to rend asunder the tenderest of human ties, it can never cease to commend itself, as a subject of serious thoughtfulness, to every benevolent Christian mind. And we would affectionately invite the professors of other religious denominations, to give to the subject that attentive consideration, which its great and increasing importance would seem to demand. We cherish no disposition to prescribe to them, in what way their particular efforts to remove this, and other evils that abound in our land, shall be directed; but we would, in Christian freedom, encourage them to embrace every right opening, for endeavoring, in the spirit of Gospel love, to persuade their brethren in religious profession, residing in the slave-holding States, seriously to examine this momentous question, in all its various bearings. As it relates to the well-being of themselves, their chil-

dren, and their country, we are persuaded they would find, (we have no doubt they often *do* find,) abundant cause for serious meditation ; but were they, in sincerity of heart, without regard to self-interest and the maxims of a cruel policy, to enter upon an enquiry into its consistency with the precepts and doctrines of Him, who in the greatness of his love for a fallen world, gave himself a ransom for *all*,—how could they turn away from the conviction,—that to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God,—to love our neighbor as ourselves,—to do unto others, as we would that they should do unto us,—are duties of universal obligation ?—and that to claim property in their fellow-men ; to hold them in unconditional bondage ; reaping the fruit of their labour without any adequate return ; and withholding, in great measure at least, the means of moral and religious instruction from those who are equally with themselves, and with us, heirs of the promises of salvation by Christ,—is wholly at variance with that dispensation, which was ushered into the world with the joyous anthem, of “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.” And seeing these things in their true light, and remembering that He whom we profess to serve, and who has “made of *one blood*, all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth,” is no respecter of persons ; that he is a God of justice, as well as of mercy, and hath declared : “For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, I will arise saith the Lord”—how could they refrain from turning to Him for strength, to pursue the path of duty, that would thus be opened before them ; and from becoming, at least, preachers of righteousness by their example, if the influence of example were all that they had it in their power to exert ? And to *this*, we have ardently desired, they may be persuaded, in love unfeigned, and by every motive that can rightly influence the Christian mind—that the blessing of millions who are ready to perish, may come upon them.

We cannot doubt that there are, among the inhabitants of the States in which Slavery is now widely extended, *those* who are taking a thoughtful, sober view, of this highly interesting subject. We are fully aware that they are surrounded with difficulties of no ordinary magnitude. We sympathize with them in their peculiar trials. But we would,—that they could be encouraged, instead of

looking too much at the difficulties that are presented to their minds, to turn to the gracious offers of assistance to all who rightly ask it, which abound throughout the sacred volume,—and to the animating hope that is set before all those who, in sincerity and singleness of heart, obey the Gospel.

In conclusion, we cannot forbear repeating, the very great solicitude we have felt, that the members of every professing Christian church may, under a deep sense of religious duty,—and encouraged by the cheering declaration,—“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy”—commence, in earnest, the endeavour to clear their hands from all participation in the continuance of Slavery in our land; and then, we believe, that difficulties that may now seem to be insurmountable, would be made to disappear, and the system itself, through the Divine blessing upon their example and their labours, cease to be a reproach to us, as a Nation.

Signed on behalf, and by direction of said Meeting,

ABRAHAM SHEARMAN, Jun.

Clerk of the Men's Meeting

HANNAH GOULD, Jun.

Clerk of the Women's Meeting.

Note, page 4.—It may be satisfactory to many of our members, as well as to others, to be informed, that this interesting concern had engaged the attention of some of the Meetings of Friends within the limits of New England Yearly Meeting, as early as the year 1716. In the 9th month of that year, the Monthly Meeting of Nantucket made a minute, expressing the “sense and judgment” of that meeting, that “it is not agreeable to Truth, for Friends to purchase Slaves, and keep them term of life.”





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